

MORESQUE ORNAMENT.

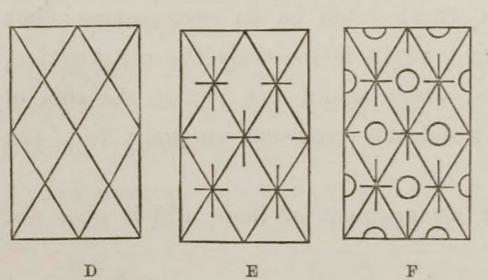
3. The general forms were first cared for; these were subdivided by general lines; the interstices were then filled in with ornament, which was again subdivided and enriched for closer inspection. They carried out this principle with the greatest refinement, and the harmony and beauty of all their ornamentation derive their chief success from its observance. Their main divisions contrast and balance admirably; the greatest distinctness is obtained; the detail never interferes with the general form. When seen at a distance, the main lines strike the eye; as we approach nearer, the detail comes into the composition; on a closer inspection, we see still further detail on the surface of the ornaments themselves.

4. Harmony of form appears to consist in the proper balancing and contrast of the straight, the inclined, and the curved.

As in colour there can be no perfect composition in which either of the three primary colours is wanting, so in form, whether structural or decorative, there can be no perfect composition in which either of the three primary figures is wanting; and the varieties and harmony in composition and design depend on the various predominance and subordination of the three.*

In surface decoration, any arrangement of forms, as at A, consisting only of straight lines, is monotonous, and affords but imperfect pleasure; but introduce lines which tend to carry the eye towards the angles, as at B, and you have at once an increased pleasure. Then add lines giving a circular tendency, as at C, and you have now complete harmony. In this case the square is the leading form or tonic; the angular and curved are subordinate.

We may produce the same result in adopting an angular composition, as at D: add the lines as at E, and we at once correct the tendency to follow only the angular direction of the inclined lines; but unite these by circles, as at F, and we have still more perfect harmony, i.e. repose, for the eye has now no longer any want that could be supplied.†



5. In the surface decoration of the Moors all lines flow out of a parent stem: every ornament, however distant, can be traced to its branch and root. They have the happy art of so adapting the ornament to the surface decorated, that the ornament as often appears to have suggested the general form as to have been suggested by it. In all cases, we find the foliage flowing out of a parent stem, and we are never offended, as in modern practice, by the random introduction of an ornament just dotted down, without a reason for its existence. However irregular the space they

* There can be no better example of this harmony than the Greek temple, where the straight, the angular, and the curved, are in most perfect relation to each other. Gothic architecture also offers many illustrations of this principle; every tendency of lines to run in one direction is immediately counteracted by the angular or the curved: thus, the capping of the buttress is exactly what is required to counteract the upward tendency of the straight lines; so the gable contrasts admirably with the curved window-head and its perpendicular mullions.

† It is to the neglect of this obvious rule that we find so many failures in paper-hangings, carpets, and more especially articles of costume; the lines of papers generally run through the ceiling most disagreeably, because the straight is not corrected by the angular, or the angular by the curved; so of carpets, the lines of carpets are constantly running in one direction only, carrying the eye right through the walls of the apartment. Again, to this we owe all those abominable checks and plaids which constantly disfigure the human form—a custom detrimental to the public taste, and gradually lowering the tone of the eye for form of this generation. If children were born and bred to the sound of hurdy-gurdies grinding out of tune, their ears would no doubt suffer deterioration, and they would lose their sensibility to the harmonious in sound. This, then, is what is certainly taking place with regard to form, and it requires the most strenuous efforts to be made by all who would take an interest in the welfare of the rising generation to put a stop to it.

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have to fill, they always commence by dividing it into equal areas, and round these trunk-lines they fill in their detail, but invariably return to their parent stem.

They appear in this to work by a process analogous to that of nature, as we see in the vine-leaf; the object being to distribute the sap from the parent stem to the extremities, it is evident the main stem would divide the leaf as near as may be into equal areas. So, again, of the minor divisions; each area is again subdivided by intermediate lines, which all follow the same law of equal distribution, even to the most minute filling-in of the sap-feeders.

6. The Moors also follow another principle; that of radiation from the parent stem, as we may see in nature with the human hand, or in a chestnut leaf.

We may see in the example how beautifully all these lines radiate from the parent stem; how each leaf diminishes towards the extremities, and how each area is in proportion to the leaf. The Orientals carry out this principle with marvellous perfection; so also did the Greeks in their honeysuckle ornament. We have already remarked, in Chapter IV., a peculiarity of Greek ornament, which appears to follow the principle of the plants of the cactus tribe, where one leaf grows out of another. This is generally the case with Greek ornament; the acanthus leaf-scrolls are a series of leaves growing out one from the other in a continuous line, whilst the Arabian and Moresque ornaments always grow out of a continuous stem.

7. All junctions of curved lines with curved, or of curved with straight, should be tangential to each other; this also we consider to be a law found everywhere in nature, and the Oriental practice is always in accordance with it. Many of the Moorish ornaments are on the same principle which is observable in the lines of a feather and in the articulations of every leaf; and to this is due that additional charm found in all perfect ornamentation, which we call the graceful. It may be called the melody of form, as what we have before described constitutes its harmony.

We shall find these laws of *equal distribution, radiation from a parent stem, continuity of line, and tangential curvature*, ever present in natural leaves.

8. We would call attention to the nature of the exquisite curves in use by the Arabs and Moors.

As with proportion, we think that those proportions will be the most beautiful which it will be most difficult for the eye to detect,* so we think that those compositions of curves will be most agreeable, where the mechanical process of describing them shall be least apparent; and we shall find it to be universally the case, that in the best periods of art, all mouldings and ornaments were founded on curves of the higher order, such as the conic sections; whilst, when art declined, circles and compass-work were much more dominant.

The researches of Mr. Penrose have shown that the mouldings and curved lines in the Parthenon are all portions of curves of a very high order, and that segments of circles were very rarely used. The exquisite curves of the Greek vases are well known, and here we never find portions of circles. In Roman architecture, on the contrary, this refinement is lost; the Romans were probably as little able to describe as to appreciate curves of a high order; and we find, therefore, their mouldings mostly parts of circles, which could be struck with compasses.

* All compositions of squares or of circles will be monotonous, and afford but little pleasure, because the means whereby they are produced are very apparent. So we think that compositions distributed in equal lines or divisions will be less beautiful than those which require a higher mental effort to appreciate them.

